

**"Little Houses"**

By HERBERT S. GORMAN.

THE particular value of *Little Houses*, apart from its introduction of a new novelist of more than ordinary excellence, lies in its powers of intriguing the interest through a surprisingly unostentatious presentation of certain simple facts and situations that hardly go far in the rounding of a complete plot. To describe George Woden's book in a phrase much battered and abused by both publisher and reviewer, it is a slice of real life. While it is evident that life is viewed somewhat from the angle of John Allday, this attitude is vindicated in the realization that John stands for a certain comprehension of the values of life. This attitude is just what the title of the book implies, that of the inmates of little houses. On the jacket of the book the publisher impudently takes the words out of the reviewer's mouth by quoting the following speech from one of the characters in the novel, "We're all nobodies, mother, very nearly all of us—nobodies in little houses—except in our eyes and the Lord's."

This, indirectly enough, expresses part of the author's intention but it does not go far enough. It was the object of the novelist to show in a calmly realistic manner that the seeming nobodies, of a small English town amounted to much more than they appeared on the surface. The maturity of observation, the careful presentation of character through dozens of apparently insignificant incidents, the subtle restraint exhibited in never letting the situations resolve themselves into a too evident striving for sentimental appeal mark an almost microscopic study of lower class life in an English manufacturing town during the last years of the decaying Victorian period that may well cause the reader to pause in admiration.

The plot, if the convolutions of the story may be so ticketed, is so simple that it can hardly be described without an uneasy sense of neglect on the part of the reviewer. For the main part, it concerns the gradual rise to success of John Allday, his reactions through a gradually growing intimacy with certain people of

social significance and the inevitable bestowal of his affections on the woman to whose heart the path lies easiest. But this is not all. A dozen figures make the book one of breathing vitality. The realism of these characterizations is remarkable. From Old Mr. Binns to the tragic and pitiful figure of Maggie Wheatley there is not a person who does not linger in the reader's mind as a completed personage by the time the end of the book is reached. Of course, John Allday, Maggie and the rebellious Sam Bloom form the core of the book and the care expended upon their portrayal is more evident than that exhibited in the case of the others. But the rounded proportions of those others are always present.

Next to John Allday the figure of Maggie is paramount. It is pitiful but persistently logical. The romantic salve is missing and while many a reader will hope violently that John will marry Maggie a true realism prevents it. His state of mind is evident in the exultation with which he welcomes each chance to mingle with the socially prominent in Selbridge and Ledley Hill. He is the true, yet unobnoxious, vulgarian. His attitude is essentially that of the lower English class, something that the American may not quite relish, but he must be judged by his own standards. After the tragic death of Sam Bloom, nine out of ten American novelists would shape the story so that John would marry Maggie. But Mr. Woden is too logical. He knows that John has climbed too hard, that the woman of social importance is too fair a bait; and so Maggie goes off into the obscurity, leaving the path of John unencumbered by any emotional obstacles.

There is but one flash of primitive emotion in the book, the vivid but discreet scene between Maggie and Sam that forces them into marriage, but it stands out all the clearer through its isolation. Handled quite as cleverly is the rather daring expedient of the novelist in bringing certain scenes to fusion through three important deaths in one day. It is surprising to note that the coincidences do not appear to be unduly strained.

As an example of characterization in its best form *Little Houses* is an admirable addition to the season's fiction. It is not a big book, but it is a splendid first attempt. It is a question to-day as to who George Woden is. This may not be the case to-morrow.

LITTLE HOUSES: A TALE OF PAST YEARS. BY GEORGE WODEN. E. P. Dutton & Company.

WE have seen but one interview with Robert W. Chambers worth reading—that which opens the Gossip Shop columns in the September *Bookman*. Although we know of one other interview with Mr. Chambers yet more interesting; it was "not for publication." The fault has not been the novelist's, and therefore the credit accruing to the *Bookman's* in-

terviewer is the greater. Mrs. Eleanor Kilmer Seeva asked interesting questions and got amusing answers.

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**"Janet of Kootenay"**

AN eighty acre farm in the Kootenay Valley is all very well; but Janet, in Evah McKowan's *Janet of Kootenay*, had one that adjoined a wounded British officer's, and, oh, the difference to her! The acres featured in these breezy letters are Mrs. McKowan's own, as one can tell with half an eye, but they become so much a part of us, or should at any rate, that the "sprouting of each turnip is an individual triumph." The person who wrote that folder is but one of many who will feel this enthusiasm, and far be it from us to spoil the fun. Our difficulty may be an inherent distaste for turnips.

There will be no middle course about these letters. Either you will find them affected and dull or the brightest, sweetest things that have come your way in a month of Sundays. If the style seems forced, the solid pages of conversation unnatural in correspondence and Janet's jauntily varied signatures grating to the nerves, it is probably because you are lacking the refinements, including agricultural. If, on the other hand, the sentiment, romance, Feminism and Back to the Land Movement contained in this one light volume delight you to a turn, you are among the fortunates for whom Mrs. McKowan's book was written.

JANET OF KOOTENAY. BY EVAH MCKOWAN. George H. Doran Company.

BLASCO IBANEZ has been at Nice, France. He wrote Charles Divine recently that he would return to Paris for a short time before sailing for New York. He is due here about the same time as Hugh Walpole.

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